

“I loved [Wisdom] and sought her from my youth;
I desired to take her for my Counsellor” (Wis 8:2a).

Solomon and Wisdom:
An example of the Closest Intimacy

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1. Introduction

At first sight, the theme of this contribution may seem rather unusual. What interest could there possibly be in speaking of the relationship between Solomon and Wisdom in the light of Wis 7-8, two chapters that are well known and have been extensively studied? The question is even more pressing when we consider that the 2011 conference in Palermo consisted of contributions that were focused on themes to do with family relationships: husbands, wives and marriage; fathers, mothers and children. All the same, Philo, certainly the most famous figure of Alexandrian Judaism, reminds us that the true kinship (the *συγγένεια*) of a man is that which he has with God through the *Logos* (one thinks, for example, of *De opificio mundi*, 146), a process of adoption which, in response to the Greek vision of man, is for Philo at the same time both gift of God and fruit of human seeking (*De virtutibus* 218), of the desire for wisdom (*De virtutibus* 79).

At the close of the first part of the book, that is to say in Wis 6:22-25, our sage announces the basic theme of the section which follows, Wis 7-10, even if the extent of the second part is actually still debatable:¹ he intends to speak of the origin, the nature and the history of Wisdom. This is that Wisdom which, especially in 7:22b-8:1, is presented as a figure of mediation between God and man, a reality originating in God, but not identical to him, present in creation and in man himself, perhaps the best attempt of contemporary Judaism to reconcile the divine immanence and transcendence.²

In fact, beside Wisdom, the principal protagonist of chapters 7-10, there emerges a second, human, protagonist, that is, the ‘I’ of the author who is being presented under the guise of Solomon although this is nev-

1 Cf., in this connection, GILBERT, *The Literary Structure*.

2 Cf. SEGALLA, *Le figure mediatrici*.

er openly stated. Inspired by the well-known accounts of the dream at Gibeon (1 Kgs 3 and 2 Chr 1), the Book of Wisdom describes Solomon at the height of his power who remembers the moment in which, as a young king (cf. 8:10b), he sought from God the gift of Wisdom (cf. 7:7 and 8:21 and the celebrated prayer of Wis 9). But in the accounts of 1 Kgs 3 and 2 Chr 1, the wisdom of Solomon is something exceptional, solely within the grasp of a king who is above every other wise man (cf. 1 Kgs 5:9-12); in the Book of Wisdom, by contrast, Solomon becomes the model of a 'democratic' king, equal, that is, to all other men (cf. 7:1-6), an example of what every human being can become from the moment when he/she receives and welcomes Wisdom.

Here it is already possible to understand the viewpoint of our sage: behind this presentation of Solomon, there emerges the typically Stoic idea of wisdom understood as sovereignty. For Stoicism, the wise man alone is the true king; therefore, every man can become 'king,' if only he acquires wisdom.³ Here we also discover what is perhaps the most significant characteristic of the Book of Wisdom: the capacity of basing itself on the Scriptures and tradition of Israel, and, at the same time, of being able to reread the biblical faith in the light of the Hellenistic culture with which our sage shows himself to have a relationship that is simultaneously critical and in dialogue.⁴

But I have already gone too far ahead: I come, therefore, to the purpose of my paper. I intend to pose some questions to the text of Wis 7-8: what relationship does it show Solomon to have with Wisdom: a marital relation, as is generally maintained, or a friendly one, or an educational one? And another question: how is the study of this relationship able to tell us something of the way in which our sage conceives human relationships more generally?

From this there arises the further question: with regard to these themes, how is the Book of Wisdom placed within the culture of its time and in the spectrum of Greek-speaking Judaism? My view is that the historical context of the Book is that of Egyptian Alexandria in the last years of the Emperor Octavian Augustus.⁵ I no longer have many doubts about this dating.

3 Cf. a good collection of examples in VON ARNIM, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* (henceforth: SVF): SVF III, 155 frg. 597/2; III, 156 frg. 599.603; III, 158 frg. 617; III, 159 frg. 620; III, 170 frg. 681.

4 Cf. MAZZINGHI, *Il libro della Sapienza: elementi culturali*.

5 This dating is now confirmed by the study of GILBERT (cf. *Your sovereignty*); in particular, analysis of the term *κράτῆσις* in Wis 6:4 seems to exclude a later date, in the time of the emperor Caligula, as maintained by authors such as G. Scarpat and D. Winston.

2. Wis 7-8: analysis of some significant Texts

2.1 The Literary Structure of Wis 7-8

Let us pass on now to a brief analysis of some significant texts drawn from Wis 7-8 regarding the relationship between Solomon and Wisdom. For our purposes, I can leave to one side an analysis of the literary structure which has already been studied thoroughly, particularly by Paolo Bizzeti and Maurice Gilbert. Despite a few differences, there is no need to go over the ground again.⁶

The text of Wis 7-8 can be subdivided into seven strophes structured concentrically. The passages which are of most interest to us here appear in the second strophe, namely Wis 7:7-12, and, above all, in the sixth strophe (Wis 8:2-9) which corresponds exactly to the second in the concentric structure just mentioned. Here Solomon describes in greater detail the relationship which he has with Wisdom.

Something of this thematic is taken up again also in 8:16, and, yet again, in the last strophe of the poem, in Wis 8:17-21 where we discover what was already anticipated in Wis 7:7 – that Wisdom comes from God and that, therefore – retrospectively – the relationship with her is the basis of another relationship even more important – that of man with God.

2.2 Wis 7:7-12: Solomon's love for Wisdom

Let us begin with a glance at the text of Wis 7:7-12. In this second strophe, after having confessed in the previous strophe (7:1-6) his own weakness and his equal existence with all other men, Solomon recalls his firm intention of loving Wisdom: "I loved her more than health and beauty; I chose to have her as light, because the radiance which hails from her never ceases" (7:10).

The verb ἀγαπάω is relatively frequent in the Book of Wisdom⁷ and, as in the opening text, Wis 1:1 ("love justice"), indicates a love of predilection, a love which chooses one thing instead of another: in this case, health and beauty. Perhaps we have here the echo of a school debate concerning the importance of the external goods.⁸ In my opinion, in the

6 Cf. GILBERT, *Sagesse de Salomon*, 69-71; BIZZETI, *Il libro della Sapienza*, 69-72; cf., also, WRIGHT, *The Structure*, 173; a slightly different picture of the literary structure of 7-8 is contained in LEPROUX, *Un discours de sagesse*, 34-38.

7 Cf. Wis 1:1; 4:10; 6:12; 7:10, 28; 8:3, 7; 11:24; 16:26.

8 Cf. WINSTON, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 167-168; LEPROUX, *Un discours de sagesse*, 147-158.

reference to Wisdom as light, there is not absent too the echo of a certain polemic against the mystery cults.⁹ But what is of interest to us is that between Solomon and Wisdom there exists a relationship of love; a link, therefore, that is very personal with regard to a figure which is, without any doubt, a feminine figure. Is this then a nuptial relationship?

The strophe concludes by recalling that Wisdom is γένετις, the 'mother,' that is, the mother of every good thing (v. 12b). In utilizing a very rare term in Greek, our author intends to show how it is from the Wisdom of Israel – and not from Greek philosophy – that all possible goods come to man as well as the possibility of enjoying them. Some similar ideas are present in Philo, in *De sobrietate* 56 and in *De virtutibus* 8. In this connection, our sage adds a motive: "Because Wisdom leads them," that is, because she guides man to the right use of those same goods and is herself the true good of man.

2.3 Wis 8:2-9: Wisdom Friend and Counsellor

The text that is clearly the most interesting for understanding the relationship between Solomon and Wisdom is to be found in the sixth strophe, in Wis 8:2-9, particularly in vv. 2-3 and 9 which open and close the strophe:

² I had her as my friend and sought her from my youth
and I desired to take her as my bride [νύμφη]
and I became enamoured of her beauty.

³ By living as a companion of God, She glorifies her noble origin
because the Sovereign of all loved her.

(...)

⁹ Therefore I determined to take her as my companion,
knowing that she would be to me a counsellor of good
and encouragement in cares and grief.

This is not the place to offer a detailed exegesis of these verses. I observe how the majority of the commentators take it for granted that it is a nuptial relationship that is being spoken of here and that binds Solomon to Wisdom.¹⁰

In the expression ταύτην ἐφίλησα which opens v. 2, the verb φιλέω, *hapax* in Wisdom, seems to have been chosen deliberately in place of ἀγαπάω. Our sage could have found it in Prov 8:17 where φιλέω appears precisely

9 Cf., for example, the mystery use of φέγγος in Plato (*Phaedr.* 250b3); cf. MAZZINGHI, *Notte di paura*, 16.

10 Cf., for example, the very careful philological analysis provided by SCARPAT, *Libro della Sapienza*, II, 185-186.

together with ἀγαπάω; both verbs are here in the mouth of the personified Wisdom. The verb φιλέω refers rather to the love of friendship. This 'friendly' dimension should make us cautious in emphasizing the nuptial aspect of Wisdom exclusively.¹¹

The verb ζητέω expresses the idea of searching already contained in the preceding stich: Wisdom is a reality which has to be searched for with passion. Moreover, the theme of the search for Wisdom is frequent in the sapiential literature (cf. Qoh 1:13; Sir 24:34; 39:1; 51:14, 21; see also the whole poem of Job 28). But what draws the attention more is the expression νύμφην ἀγάγεσθαι contained in the second stich of v. 2, which seems to be deliberately alluding to the ancient custom of leading the bride into the house of the husband, sometimes on the part of the husband himself, an expression already present in the Odyssey (14,211). At first sight, this imagery appears to be nuptial: Solomon has sought (ἐζήτησα) to take Wisdom as his bride: the pronoun ἐμαυτῷ reinforces the idea of belonging. The image of Wisdom as bride is already present in Sir 14:20-15:6 (cf., particularly, 15:2). When a little later, our sage declares that he has become "enamoured" (ἐραστής) of the beauty of Wisdom, we cannot deny that here too there is an allusion to the nuptial dimension.

However, as has recently been demonstrated in the doctoral thesis of A. Leproux, the term νύμφη may refer to the world of the Nymphs, the daughters of Zeus, companions of the gods, personification of the forces of nature, often confused with the Muses, from whom men seek to gain favours. The temple of the Nymphs was found close to the Academy to remind the philosophers that the source of their knowledge, of all their art, towered over human resources. In our text, Wisdom seems to wish to adopt the role of the Nymphs in a polemical fashion: the term νύμφη, therefore, does not necessarily refer to Wisdom as a bride, but, in this perspective, to Wisdom as counsellor of man (cf. v. 9) and initiator into the mysteries of God. The text of Wis 8:4 describes Wisdom itself as μύστις, that is, as 'initiate' in the divine mysteries. In Wis 7:17-20, Wisdom acts as teacher for Solomon, bringing him to a knowledge that is truly encyclopaedic.¹²

In v. 3, we discover that the importance of Wisdom arises from her intimate existence with God: συμβίωσιν θεοῦ ἔχουσα. The term συμβίωσις (present also in vv. 9a and 16c) indicates 'cohabitation,' even in a conjugal sense: this word is used in the LXX in only these three places. Wisdom,

11 Cf. SPICQ, *Agapè*, 12-70.

12 On all of this, cf. the detailed analysis of LEPROUX, *Un discours de sagesse*, 274-282. It could, perhaps, be objected that wisdom is also mother (cf. 7:12); as such, she is also educator.

then, is pictured as 'bride' of God or 'cohabitor' with God himself. But the metaphors of Wis 7:25-26 avoid the risk of thinking that Wisdom can be understood as a sort of female divinity beside God and so as a kind of divine bride. It is necessary, therefore, to note that the term *συμβίωσις* also indicates forms of cohabitation other than the conjugal. For example, in Philo's *In Flaccum* 158, the term *συμβιωτής* indicates one who lives with a powerful man; so Wisdom appears not only as bride but also as friend.¹³

That, for Solomon, Wisdom is not only 'bride' but also something else is better understood if we look at v. 9: in fact, Wisdom will be for Solomon a *σύμβουλος ἀγαθῶν*, that is, a "counsellor of good things." The term *σύμβουλος* is rare in the LXX (cf. 2 Chr 22:3; 2 Macc 7:25). Here it governs an objective genitive and should be understood as a counsellor of good things in the sense of one who counsels or recommends the good.

Alongside this responsibility of Wisdom will be also that of 'adviser.' The term *παραίνεσις* is another LXX *hapax* and by itself means 'exhortation, recommendation, advice.' Larcher holds that the context suggests rather the sense of 'comforter,' above all on the strength of the two ensuing terms, 'cares and grief.'¹⁴ With greater attention to the rhetorical context of Wis 7-8, Giuseppe Scarpat sees in *παραίνεσις* a reference to the *παραινετικὸς λόγος*, namely, to the *paraenetica* which is that part of Greek philosophy which advises on the just behaviour of man, in particular freeing him from useless worries and sorrow (*φροντίδων καὶ λύπης*). Let us recall how in Wis 9:15 the *νοῦς* of man is described as a mind "of many worries" (*πολυφροντίς*) if it allows itself to be dragged along by the body without receiving Wisdom.¹⁵ So a translation of *παραίνεσις* as 'adviser' is necessary: one who teaches and advises, in fact one who 'counsels' man: not only spouse, not only friend, but also teacher.¹⁶

13 Cf., for greater details, the observations of LEPROUX, *Un discours de sagesse*, 266-268. Of this friendship offered by wisdom, the conjugal variety would constitute the highest degree; for this reason, a reading of wisdom as 'spouse' does not, in fact, deny but even presupposes, the idea of wisdom as 'friend,' an idea which is not normally present in the commentaries; cf., also, *infra*.

14 Cf. LARCHER, *Le livre de la Sagesse*, II, 537.

15 Cf. SCARPAT, *Libro della Sapienza*, II, 154.

16 Cf., also, the comment at 8:4b. We must not wholly exclude here a further polemical point against the Isis cult: in the *The Third Greek Hymn of Isidorus* (line 6), Isis is described as the one who offers men *σωφροσύνην ἄλυπον*, the one who frees man from every grief, giving him, that is, a prudence without pain; in the *Book of Wisdom*, on the other hand, the same role is attributed to the personified Wisdom.

2.4 Wis 8:16: To live with Wisdom

The image of Wisdom as friend returns at the conclusion of the next strophe, in Wis 8:16, another text which should not be loaded immediately with a nuptial sense:

¹⁶ When I enter my house, I shall find rest with her,
for companionship with her has no bitterness,
and to have her as companion gives no pain,
but gladness and joy.

I limit myself to observing that this verse opens by recalling that each time Solomon enters his house, he rests with Wisdom. The verb *προσαναπαύω*, yet another *hapax* of the LXX, can indicate, in fact resting both with one's own spouse and with a friend.¹⁷ The term *συναναστροφή* recurs only in 3 Macc 2:31, 33 where it indicates association, or frequenting, and in 3 Macc 3:5 where it indicates the social behaviour of a specific group. Here, the reference is to a form of association, the company of Wisdom (the Latin version translates with *conversatio*). The text adds once more the term *συμβίωσις*, already mentioned with regard to 8:3 which refers, as has been said, to the idea of a common life, not necessarily one of a conjugal character.

To live with wisdom, to have her as one's spouse, or, perhaps better, as one's friend and counsellor (but also both these things together...) gives a man neither suffering (*πικρία*) nor grief (*ὀδύνη*). Perhaps our author could have had in mind the text of Qoh 7,26^{LXX} in which Solomon records the traditional opinion which considered women more bitter (*πικρότερον*) than death; living with wisdom, on the contrary, does not cause the one who welcomes her any bitterness or grief.¹⁸

2.5 Wis 8:17-18: The company of Wisdom

Further clues as to the relationship between Solomon and Wisdom are found in the last strophe of the poem of Wis 7-8, especially in vv. 17-18:

¹⁷ EPICLETUS, Discourses. 3,13,2; cf. LARCHER, Le livre de la Sagesse, II, 543-544.

¹⁸ It is possible also to think of an Homeric reminiscence: by espousing Wisdom, Solomon will not become *πικρογάμος* as happens instead to the Proci who seize the legitimate spouses of others (cf. Od., 1,266; 4,436; 17,137). Cf. SCARPAT, Libro della Sapienza, II, 198.

¹⁷ When I considered these things inwardly,
 and thought upon them in my mind,
 that in kinship with wisdom there is immortality,
¹⁸ and in friendship with her, pure delight,
 and in the labours of her hands, unfailing wealth,
 and in the experience of her company, understanding,
 and renown in taking part in her conversations,
 I went about seeking how to take her for myself...

Here we find mention of *συγγένεια*, a term which indicates a relation of kindred or affinity: in Stoic philosophy, one of the forms in which friendship is expressed is precisely the friendship between parents (the *συγγενική φιλία*).¹⁹ The term *συγγένεια* also indicates a relation of close friendship and solidarity to the point of assuming social and political meanings. In the Hellenistic world, there was a common idea that man possesses a natural kinship with God based on reason and therefore a natural one. The theme is classic, present, for example, in Plato (*Timaeus* 90a; *Leges* 10,899d). The idea is taken up again by Philo who, although distancing himself in part from the Greek concept, considers the kinship of man with God not so much as a human achievement but rather as a gift deriving from the presence in man of the reason which brings him close to God (cf. *De opificio mundi* 145-146 and especially *De specialibus legibus* 4:14).²⁰ The mention of friendship (*φιλία*) in the stich that immediately follows strengthens this area of meaning: the sage is able to grasp a solid link of friendship with Wisdom to whom he is related.

In v. 18, we find the rather unusual expression *ἐν συγγυμνασίᾳ ὁμιλίας αὐτῆς*. The term *ὁμιλία* indicates some form of association and also of speech, of conversation, of encounter or company. The text also speaks of *ἐν κοινωνίᾳ λόγων αὐτῆς*, that is, of taking part in her conversations. The connection here is classic.²¹ The term *συγγυμνασία*, *hapax* of the LXX, can indicate, on the other hand, a common activity, a mutual relationship, even in a sexual sense.²² It can generally be translated by "the experience of her company," that is to say, the being together with Wisdom, whether as bride, if one wishes to retain the nuptial metaphor, whether as companion, friend and counsellor. In this relationship with Wis-

19 Cf. SVF III, 26 frg. 112.

20 Cf. DES PLACES, *La syggeneia chrétienne*; see the entry *συγγενής, συγγένεια* by MICHAELIS, 737-742. Cf., also, SCARPAT, *Libro della Sapienza*, II, 157-160 and, again, SPICQ, *Notes de Léxicographie Néo-Testamentaire*, 836-839.

21 Cf., *infra*, the Stoic theme of friendship understood precisely as a form of *κοινωνία*.

22 As well shown by SCARPAT, *Libro della Sapienza*, II, 164-165, the term *συγγυμνασία* enters into the Stoic definition of the *τέχνη* and concerns particularly the putting into practice of those ethical principles which have to do with morality.

dom, in this activity with her (συγγυμνασία refers also to the practice of a common sporting activity), the sage obtains the true φρόνησις, or that prudence which has already been mentioned in 8:6, 7, the virtue, that is, which endows the sage with discernment. And, moreover, as v. 21 clearly explains, this Wisdom is a reality which man can obtain only if he seeks it from God. Familiarity with Wisdom puts man into direct contact with the Lord. Cf., in particular, 7:14: "those who use her obtain friendship with God"; cf. also 7:27. These are texts to which we shall return.

But it is necessary now to pass from analysis of the text to the study of what the relationship between Solomon and wisdom, as it is described in Wisdom 7-8, can tell us about human relationships, especially if we study it in the light of the historico-cultural context in which our author lives.

3. Solomon and Wisdom: towards new forms of relationship

In his encomium on wisdom (Wis 7-8), our sage employs, as his primary source of inspiration, the figure of personified wisdom received from the biblical tradition beginning with the texts of Proverbs 1-9. As is well known, the Book of Wisdom, is primarily based on a continual *relecture* of the scriptures, texts which our sage keeps in mind on every page.²³ The figure of Wisdom, received from the biblical tradition, is re-presented by the author of the book first of all in the light of the idea, of clear Stoic origin, of a *logos* or a divine *spirit* which fills the cosmos and which, therefore, is present in man, and, again, is re-read by means of the echoes hailing from the suggestive figure of the Egyptian goddess, Isis, viewed in the Hellenised form in which she was well known to Alexandrian culture. Working in this way, our sage operates on two fronts simultaneously: the Jewish world, within which he moves and whose faith he never submits to discussion; and, at the same time, the attractions originating in the Hellenistic world, attractions which the author seeks to make his own in so far as they can serve to revitalise the same Jewish faith and enable it to be lived within a cultural environment that can sometimes seem hostile.

In this way, the wisdom presented by our sage in Wis 7-10 is first of all the mediator between God and men, as she was, after all, in Proverbs 8; she is also associated with the Spirit of God which permeates the world, and is active in creation and in men (cf., already, 1:4-6; cf., also, 7:22; 8:1 and 9:17); wisdom is a reality which saves men themselves and guides

23 Cf., for example, GILBERT, *Wisdom of Solomon and Scripture*.

them on the right path (cf. Wis 9:18); she is, in short, a feminine figure who can wear many hats: wife, friend, teacher and, finally, guide towards life with God and so towards immortality.²⁴

We shall concern ourselves, then, with these relational characteristics of wisdom in the pages that follow, seeking, at the same time, to show that the Book of Wisdom has something original to say, precisely with regard to such forms of relationship.

3.1 Wisdom and Nuptiality

The relationship between Solomon and Wisdom described in the passages of Wisdom 7-8 certainly presents a nuptial dimension, even if, as we have observed, this aspect should not be exaggerated. I recall that this subject has already been dealt with in a well-known article by P. Beauchamp, *Epouser la Sagesse ou n'épouser qu'elle?*, which starts off, in fact, from the text of Wis 10:1-2.²⁵ Beauchamp observes that, from the list of goods provided by Wisdom (cf. 7:11), the good of fertility is wholly absent. We should add that in presenting us with Solomon, our sage never alludes to the subject of the wives or women of the king (cf. 1 Kgs 3:1; 11:1-8). As M. Gilbert shows in his contribution,²⁶ by contrast with what happens in Ben Sira, the book of Wisdom never speaks explicitly of wives and children except in connection with the wives and children of the wicked (cf. 3:12, 16; 4:6). Our sage certainly does not show that enthusiasm for family life which is present in the Book of Tobit.²⁷ On the other hand, in the Book of Wisdom, there is no condemnation or downgrading of marriage (one thinks of the positive notion of conception offered in Wis 7:2). Above all there are no misogynous texts. On this last point, Wisdom is far from authors like Ben Sira and that Philo who is not exempt from a vision of sexuality that is essentially negative, limited to a chaste union lived within marriage for the sole purpose of procreation. Look at the figure of Joseph in De Josepho 42-43. For the negative view of woman, cf. *De opificio mundi* 151-152; *Apologia pro Iudaeis* 11.14-17.²⁸

Beauchamp notes further that the Book of Wisdom seems to be the

24 Cf. PERDUE, *The Sword and the Stylus*, 352-353.

25 BEAUCHAMP, *Epouser la Sagesse*; cf., also, NICCACCI, *Wisdom as Woman*, especially 374, 384.

26 See Maurice Gilbert's article in this volume.

27 Cf., MILLER, *Marriage in the Book of Tobit*.

28 Cf. LEVINE, 'Women Like This' (cf. CAMP, *Understanding a Patriarchy*, 1-40; ROMARY WEGNER, *Philo's Portrayal of Women*, 41-66).

expression of a tendency present in contemporary Judaism which does not wholly exclude the value of chastity and even of celibacy from the life of the sage. One thinks, for example, of the text of the Testament of Joseph 10,2-3: God loves chastity (see also Test. Jud. 16,3). What Philo writes à propos of the Therapeuti is well-known, to say nothing of the community at Qumran. In *De vita contemplativa* 68, Philo records that the Therapeuti women observe chastity (ἀγνεία), not under duress but through free choice. Moreover, they do so out of zeal and the desire that they have for Wisdom (διὰ ζήλου καὶ πόθου σοφίας). This is an observation that is particularly interesting in connection with the texts of Wisdom which we have presented: abstinence from marriage, in fact, is linked by Philo to the desire for Wisdom.²⁹

In also presenting Wisdom with nuptial traits, the Book of Wisdom leads us to think of the life of the sage within a marital dimension. From this point of view, the text of Wis 7-8 seems to wish to take up some ideas already present in Proverbs 1-9 where the figure of Lady Wisdom has also something of a nuptial quality (cf., for example, Prov 8:35 compared with 18:22).³⁰ However, our author seems to go beyond the received tradition and suggests the possibility of a new style of life for the sage, describing for Solomon, the ideal sage, not only the possibility of ‘cohabitation’ also with Wisdom, but, perhaps – if we go along with Beauchamp – *only* with Wisdom. However, the Book of Wisdom never goes so far as to speak explicitly of chastity, something the Latin version does with great clarity by translating the term ἐγκρατής present in Wis 8,21 with ‘continens’ and thus paving the way for a ‘celibate’ reading of the relationship between Solomon and Wisdom.³¹

From this point of view, it is really interesting what M. Tait suggests:³² later texts like Wisdom seem to reverse the genders of the traditional God-Husband/People-Wife imagery. Tait suggests that as religion became more individual³³ the old imagery of God was changing to avoid

29 Cf. PHILON DE ALEXANDRIE, *De vita contemplativa*, 127n 6.

30 Cf. NICCACCI, *Wisdom as Woman*, 379.

31 On the translation of the term ἐγκρατής rather in the sense of ‘strong,’ ‘capable of,’ and in general, on the problem raised by this term, cf. LEPROUX, *Un discours de Sagesse*, 308-324, with many bibliographical references; on the value of ‘continence’ considered within the framework of Alexandrian Judaism, cf. SCARPAT, *Libro della Sapienza*, II, 167-172.

32 TAIT, *Jesus, the Divine Bridegroom*, 222-225; cf. also SATLOW, *The Metaphor of Marriage*, 17-18, cited by Tait.

33 One thinks, in particular, of the diffusion of the mystery cults and of the strong temptation that could arise for the young Jews of Alexandria from the figure of Isis which was so pervasive there.

sounding somewhat homoerotic, and that therefore there was need to introduce a feminine figure to attract individual male worshippers.

3.2 Wisdom and Friendship

Analysis of the texts of Wisdom has shown us that one of the traits which characterise the relationship between Solomon and Wisdom is that of friendship, perhaps even before that of the nuptial love of which we have just spoken. Once again, I take my starting point from the proposals advanced by A. Leproux.³⁴

Leproux shows how, in the cultural context of the first century BCE, there developed a real culture of friendship, a theme, moreover, which had already been firmly present in Aristotelian philosophy. Philosophers and orators contemporary with Wisdom praise the value of friendship as at once a human and political virtue; cf. the *De amicitia* of Cicero. Stoic philosophy especially considers friendship to be a great value. In polemic with the Epicureans who consider friendship as something originating in egoistic motives, the Stoics defend it, seeing it as the fruit of the natural inclination towards the neighbor. Friendship is virtue proper to the sages and consists in a full agreement, in communion (*κοινωνία*) of life (cf. Wis 8:17) and in a true spiritual harmony (*συμφωνία καὶ ὁμόνοια*).³⁵

In the Hellenistic Judaism, the Book of Ben Sira is an authoritative witness to the increasing importance afforded to the theme of friendship, a value which goes well beyond the relationship of mere kinship. It is enough to think of the text of Sir 6:5-17 which presents notable points of contact with the vision of friendship belonging to the Greek culture of the time. In the case of Ben Sira, it is readily understandable how Jewish reflection on friendship also develops because of the influence of Greek thought.³⁶

Apart from the friendship understood in an erotic sense in the LXX of Prov 5:19 and 7:18, the LXX mentions *φιλία* mostly in the political sense, a theme employed frequently in 1 Maccabees and 4 Maccabees. Philo is seen to be adopting the Stoic ideal on friendship. The texts in question are quite

34 Cf. LEPROUX, *Un discours de Sagesse*, 260-274; cf., in particular, the bibliography given on p. 269 n. 43.

35 Cf. SVF III, frgg. 21.43.348.723-724; friendship is a virtue proper to the sages: SVF III, frgg. 630-633; friendship consists in harmony and mutual agreement (*συμφωνία καὶ ὁμόνοια*: SVF III, frg. 661). Cf. POHLENZ, *La Stoa*, I, 283-284 n. 5. For a more general view of the theme, cf. SCHREY, *Freundschaft*.

36 Cf. CORLEY, *Ben Sira's Teaching on Friendship*.

numerous: cf., for example, *De virtutibus* 55 and 60, relating to the friendship of Moses with Joshua; cf., also, *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 44, with regard to God himself who defends the right of his friends.³⁷ However, as we shall see, Philo insists much more on man's friendship with God.

Returning to the Book of Wisdom, the figure of the wicked to whom our sage awards the speech in *Wis* 1:16-2:24, shows itself to be negative, as one of the polemical hints introduced by our author, whether that directed against the associations of the time or against the clubs of pleasure-seeking youngsters existing in Alexandria, especially those of a Dionysian character. These are those wicked men who, according to *Wis* 1:16 belong to the 'party of death,' or to that group close to Antony and Cleopatra which Plutarch calls precisely the "companions of death" (*Vit. Ant.* 28, 2; 71, 4). The allusion to γέλος, to laughing, contained in *Wis* 17:8 refers to the company of those called γελοιασταί, the 'buffoons' who came together for drunken expeditions from one place to another in the city.³⁸

The wicked of *Wis* 2 are basically promoting a kind of 'friendship' that relies on unbridled entertainment, on laughter, on dissipation, on contempt for the other, a lifestyle certainly designed to win the favour of the young Alexandrian Jews – indeed the young of every time! –, a lifestyle which our sage seeks to deconstruct, presenting in *Wis* 7-8 a new model of friendly relationship, a truly singular friendship, namely that between Solomon and Wisdom.

To the young Jews of Alexandria, future leaders of the community, our sage, as a good teacher, offers an ideal of friendship not too far from that offered by Stoic philosophy: a strong relationship of friendship, based on a common "nobility of origin" (cf. *Wis* 8:3), on "kinship" (8:17), on cohabitation (8:3, 9, 16) and on wise "conversation" (8:18), on the sharing of the virtues which are the fruit of what is obtained from Wisdom, those typically Greek virtues mentioned explicitly in 8:7. In summary, friendship with Wisdom offers to the one who welcomes it all those characteristics which the world of that time considered to belong to the true friend.³⁹

We must not forget, however, that Wisdom is a feminine figure which has behind it that personified Wisdom already known to the Hebrew world from Proverbs 1-9 onwards. However, even if the Woman Wisdom is not a woman of flesh and bone, Solomon's friendship is an unusual one given that the friendship lauded by the Hellenistic world is

37 Cf. ΣΤΗΛΙΝ, φίλος κτλ., 154-156; SPICQ, Notes, II, 936-939.

38 On all this, cf. BASLEZ, *The Author of Wisdom*, 40-41; on the γελοιασταί cf. MAZZINGHI, *Notte di paura e di luce*, 97.

39 Cf. *supra*, the comment on the passages of Wisdom recorded here.

principally that between persons of the same sex. Perhaps it is really too risky to press too far along these lines except to state that our sage has in mind a real model of friendship between men and women to propose to his listeners. And yet our sage could have in mind here the woman of the Canticum – who is, at the same time spouse *and* friend (cf. in particular Ct 4,7-8)⁴⁰ – even if, in my opinion, it is very improbable that the Canticum lies behind the text of Wis 7-8;⁴¹ moreover, the LXX of the Canticum translates the Hebrew word for “my friend,” that is חַבֵּר, with the Greek word πλησίον, that is ‘neighbour,’ and not precisely ‘friend.’

It is legitimate, however, to think that this proposal could sound new-fangled to the Jews of Alexandria, and even a little over the top. The mention of the friendly relationship between Solomon and Wisdom tells us in any case that, for our sage, the traditional paradigm of the family understood for the Jew as a basic relational value (husband-wife / parents-children) is not the only paradigm possible. Moreover, already in the text of Wisdom 3-4, our sage has shown us that wholly traditional values such as fecundity and longevity should and can be relativised, in that case in view of the final destiny which awaits the just: life with God.

But there is more: in describing the relationship of friendship of Solomon with Wisdom, our sage observes precisely how this friendship leads him to be intimate with God, his friend, a member, that is, of his court. Look at the text of Wis 7:27 which should be understood along the lines of a political and religious sense of friendship: Wisdom “makes friends of God and prophets.” In thinking of the divine royalty, our sage can have also had in mind the figure of the φίλοι βασιλέως, the friends of the king who occupied the more elevated positions in the Ptolemaic court.⁴² In the biblical context, to speak of “friends of God” is something really exceptional even if the text of Isa 41:8 (cf., also, 2 Chr 22:7) speaks of Abraham as friend of God. In the LXX the term φίλος appears only in Exod 33:11 with regard to Moses. Only later do we find this theme again in Philo à propos of the sage as friend of God (cf. the texts of Her. 21; Prob. 44; Abr. 129; in the NT, cf. Jas 2:23).⁴³

Friendship with Wisdom is, therefore, bound up closely with friendship with God. That does not surprise us, seeing that Wisdom, the protagonist of Wis 7-10, is intimate with God. This ‘vertical’ aspect of the

40 Cf. BARBIERO, Canticum dei Cantici, 78-79.

41 The reasons are well supplied by GILBERT, La figure de Salomon.

42 Cf. BOFFO, Iscrizioni greche e latine, 93-94; cf., also, SCARPAT, Il libro della Sapienza, II, 80-81.

43 For the development of this theme in ancient, and especially Jewish, tradition, cf. the numerous references in WINSTON, The Wisdom of Solomon, 188-189.

friendly dimension ought not to be underestimated. We shall take it up again soon towards the conclusion of this paper.

3.3 Wisdom and the educational relationship

Analysis of the texts of Wis 7-8 has shown us how the relationship between Solomon and Wisdom is also that which characterises the teacher and his disciple. We should remember, especially, the reading that I offered of the texts of Wis 8:2 and 8:9: Wisdom is counsellor, and so teacher.⁴⁴

The educational dimension that belongs to the sapiential literature is well-known:⁴⁵ the text of Proverbs 1-9 is introduced as a real educational manual addressed to young men (cf. the prologue to the book: Prov 1:1-7).⁴⁶ The sage-teacher hides behind the parental metaphor: he is father and mother together.⁴⁷ In the three discourses of Wisdom personified (Prov 1:20-32; 8:1-36; 9:1-6), Wisdom herself assumes an immediate educative role with regard to the young disciples whom she is addressing.

In the other sapiential texts too, the educational dimension is very strong. The epilogue to Qoheleth speaks of the author of the book as a true teacher of wisdom (cf. Qoh 12:9). For his part, Ben Sira presents himself too as a teacher speaking to his disciples (cf. the mention of the school in Sir 51:23).⁴⁸ With Ben Sira, we enter henceforward into a different perspective, one open to contact with the Hellenistic world. He was certainly a teacher well established in the Judaism of his time but, at the same time, open to many elements hailing from the Greek culture.⁴⁹

The position of Ben Sira was certainly not that of other Jews of his time. According to Eupolemus it was Moses who taught men (and, therefore, also the Greeks) writing and letters;⁵⁰ polemically, the book of the Similitudes of Enoch (cf. 1 Enoch 59:9-10) attributes them to the work of one of the fallen angels. In fact, Ben Sira was one of those who introduced

44 And, again, LEPROUX who, with regard to Wis 7-8, has shown in more detail, what he calls the 'isotopia' of education, or the description of wisdom as educator; cf. *Un discours de sagesse*, 166-211.

45 Cf. CIMOSA, *Educazione e insegnamento*; CRENSHAW, *Education in Ancient Israel*; Fox, *Proverbs 1-9* (cf., especially, 309-318: «Who can learn and how? A debate in ancient pedagogy»); GILBERT, *A l'école de la sagesse*; WHYBRAY, *The Intellectual Tradition*.

46 Cf. MAZZINGHI, *La sfida educativa*, with further bibliography on Proverbs 1-9.

47 Cf. PINTO, "Ascolta, figlio"; SIGNORETTO, *Metafora e didattica*.

48 Cf. J. Vermeylen in this volume.

49 Cf., for example, DI LELLA, *Conservative and Progressive Theology*.

50 Cf. the fragment recorded by EUSEBIUS, *Praep. Ev.* 9,26. Cf. WACHOLDER, *Eupolemus*, especially pp. 71-96.

to Jerusalem the notion that the young should be educated with a book in the hand: the Torah. As Elias Bickerman observes acutely: "The study of the Law on the part of the laity was a Hellenistic innovation in Jerusalem."⁵¹ Ben Sira, lover and defender of the tradition of Israel, is presented as a good teacher, open to interaction with the new Hellenistic culture.

In Alexandrian Judaism, the Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides – a text difficult to date – are an excellent example of the concern of educated Jews for the παιδεία of the young, an education in this case that was extremely open to the Hellenistic world yet at the same time centred on the ethical values of the Torah.⁵² But already in the Letter of Aristeas, παιδεία, the exercise of culture and the relative care devoted to it precisely at the beginning of the letter (cf. Arist. 8; also 121-122; 143), becomes a true point of encounter between the Jewish and Greek worlds.⁵³ Philo, in particular, speaks many times, with pride, of the level of education received by the young Jews of Alexandria as one of the distinctive traits of the people of Israel, who, right from their most tender infancy, learn the laws of the fathers which distinguish them from other peoples; παιδεία, yes, in the way the Greeks teach, but according to the Torah. Moreover, in the Vita Mosis II,32, Philo praises the translators of the LXX precisely because they received a Greek education.⁵⁴

Concern for education on the part of authors such as these appears as the Jewish attempt to respond to the centrality of παιδεία in the Greek world which has been well defined by H. I. Marrou as "a civilization of παιδεία."⁵⁵ Education, in the first place that obtained in the gymnasium, was the only possible gateway through which to become citizens of this new world which undoubtedly seduced many Jews as well, especially those of the more affluent classes.

In the Book of Wisdom, the subject of education is central. Already, after all, the beginning of the book reminded us of the importance of παιδεία, of the education offered by the "holy spirit" which is then linked to Wisdom itself (cf. Wis 1:5). A good example of the book's interest in education, beyond the style of the book which has been profoundly influenced by the rhetoric of the time, is the literary genre employed by

51 BICKERMAN, *The Jews in the Greek Age*, 173.

52 Cf. PERDUE, *The Sword and the Stylus*, 305-306, with additional bibliography.

53 Cf. BOCCACCINI, *Middle Judaism*, 160-185.

54 Cf., also, Praem. 112; Spec. Leg. I,34; II,88; IV,149-150; Mos. I,31-33; cf., also, JOSEPHUS, Ap. I, 60; II, 173-174. Cf. BARCLAY, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 412-413.

55 MARROU, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, 95; one remembers also the fundamental work of JÄGER, *Paideia*. On the problem of young men in the Hellenistic world, cf. LEGRAS, *Néotês*.

our author. The question of the literary genre of Wisdom has not been wholly resolved, but I think that one is on good ground in claiming that the literary genre of the book is that of the encomium which belongs to the epideictic genre.⁵⁶ Our sage also chooses, therefore, to instruct the young according to the rules of good rhetoric. In this, the Book of Wisdom reflects the centrality that rhetoric had by now in the educational sphere in the Greek world.⁵⁷

Leo Perdue writes: "Speaking as the long-dead Solomon (cf. chs. 7-8), the rhetor addresses the 'judges of the earth' and kings (1:1; 6:1), likely only a rhetorical device, and yet it was possible for rhetors who represented constituencies to address public assemblies, gathered for open lectures, or to make a presentation in the prefect's court. In addition, the setting could have been a public forum in which a rhetor would have uttered his speech."⁵⁸

If his audience was, as we hold, formed from the elite of the Jewish community in Alexandria, his opponents were those members of the community who, in the name of an uncritical acceptance of the Greek culture, had abandoned the faith of their fathers: namely, the wicked of Chapter 2.

The relationship between Wisdom and her disciple Solomon thus becomes the model for an authentic educational relationship, a third type of human relationship put forward by our sage after the dimensions of nuptiality and friendship, in this case also going beyond the traditional values of the family, even if the educator never loses a strongly parental character. The relationship between Solomon and the Wisdom which instructs him is an open relationship founded not on force or discipline but rather on acceptance and exhortation, already present in the mouth of the author of the book himself in the double use of the verb παιδεύω which, in Chapter 6, twice concludes an entire section (6:11-25). A pedagogic relationship which, as already was the case for the older sages, does not close itself to the circumstances of the world around it, in this case those coming from the Hellenistic world, but accepts the challenge they offer.⁵⁹

56 Cf. a brief summary of the problem in GILBERT, *La Sagesse de Salomon et l'hellénisme*.

57 Cf. PERDUE, *The Sword and the Stylus*, 324 nn. 113, 115.

58 PERDUE, *The Sword and the Stylus*, 326.

59 A good example of this attitude is the position held by our sage concerning a possible relationship between the Torah of Israel and the natural law, as the latter was conceived of in the philosophical culture of the time, especially in Stoicism. Cf. MAZZINGHI, *Law of Nature*.

3.4 Wisdom and Familiarity with God

Familiarity with Wisdom – bride, friend, teacher – leads Solomon to familiarity with God. Beyond the text of Wis 7:27 which we have already mentioned, we ought to add that of Wis 7:14:

¹⁴ She [Wisdom] is an unailing treasure for men;
those who use her lay hold of friendship with God,
and are commended by the gifts that come from [her] education.

The Scriptures are not unaware of the theme of friendship with God; cf. Isa 41:8; 2 Chr 20:7 with regard to Abraham, as I have already mentioned. Through Wisdom, it is possible to recover an intimate relationship with God like that of the great figures in the history of Israel.

The reference to the commendation (συσταθέντες) of the “gifts that come from their education” can be considered as a polemic with regard to the offerings and sacrificial gifts which do not have the value which a holy life has for God. It is also possible to think of an allusion to the Hellenistic practices of presenting oneself before the deities with ritual offerings. But the complex of Chapters 7-8 suggests to us that with παιδεία it is necessary to see something more: it is the formation, the education which originates from having received the gift of Wisdom and which also carries with itself, as is seen in Wis 7:17-20, the values typical of the Greek culture of the time.⁶⁰ The theme of παιδεία thus becomes the backbone of the entire strophe, that is, Wis 7,13-22a.⁶¹ What commends man to God is his having received the παιδεία, the formation, offered by Wisdom. And this education leads to a higher level of relations: familiarity with God.

Of this familiarity Wisdom is the mediator, as appears clearly from the whole prayer of Wis 9. Here too, the Temple, central element of the Jewish cult remains important (cf. Wis 9:8), but only through the mediation of Wisdom which in 9:17 is once again linked with the Spirit, thus assuming a profound interior dimension.⁶²

In the end, it is this relationship with God that is truly dear to our sage just as is the case in Ben Sira (cf. Sir 39:5-6 with regard to Solomon). Solomon becomes the example of that familiarity with God which, in the works of Philo, characterises figures like Abraham and Moses. Abraham, “friend of God,” has God as his father and is “rich with every kind of wealth, since he lives among those goods which are the only ones that

60 There is a good commentary on this text in SCARPAT, *Il libro della Sapienza*, II, 39-51.

61 An ‘isotopia,’ according to LEPROUX, *Un discours de sagesse*, 167.

62 Cf. MCGLYNN, *Solomon, Wisdom and the Philosopher-Kings*, 68-72.

are authentic and unfailing and which, exempt from the ravages of time, remain ever new and young" (De sobrietate 56).

As M. Gilbert demonstrated clearly, the theme of the knowledge of God is one of the central themes of the Book of Wisdom.⁶³ The entire third part of the book has the form of a *eucologia*, or better of a hymnic anamnesis of the Exodus in which the relationship of the author of the book with God takes on a central role.⁶⁴

As we already observed, however, the Book of Wisdom is situated in a particular religious context: in Alexandria, the mystery cults assumed great importance and, among these, that of Isis in a special way (cf. n. 16 and 33). Whoever participated in these cults was searching not only for immediate happiness and a practical salvation but was also pursuing in some way a mystical experience. The devotee of Isis was seeking in fact a familiarity with the divine in order to give sense to his life. Isidore's four Isiac hymns, composed in Hellenised Egypt around 80 BCE attest in their entirety a profound and personal relationship of the worshipper with the goddess, a benevolent figure, a presence who loves men and who, by controlling fate, is able to preserve them from death (cf., for example, Isid. I,29-35; II,9).

It is not possible to point out in detail the many links that exist between the figure of Wisdom described in Wisdom 7-10 and the Isis mysteries.⁶⁵ In my opinion, our sage invests Wisdom with Isiac traits for two main reasons: to create a figure in opposition to the goddess most venerated in Alexandria and, at the same time, to respond positively to the needs of those Jews who, attracted by Isis, did not grasp that they could find in their Wisdom – and so in the God of Israel – a better salvation. From this point of view, our sage fulfils a real work of inculturation.

The relationship between Solomon and Wisdom recalls in many aspects that of the devotee of Isis with his goddess. One thinks, for example, of the theme of the presence of Wisdom beside man in Wis 9:9-10.⁶⁶ But, for Solomon, to have Wisdom as bride, friend, teacher and mother means to attain an authentic relationship with the God of Israel: the "God of the fathers and Lord of mercy" (Wis 9:1), Creator and, at the same time Saviour of man (Wis 9:1, 18). Rather than as interpretation of the Torah, Wisdom is offered to the man who welcomes her as the interpretation of human finiteness and of a possible, profound, relationship with God.⁶⁷

63 GILBERT, La connaissance de Dieu.

64 Cf. GILBERT, L'adresse à Dieu.

65 Cf., for example, MAZZINGHI, La barca della provvidenza, with additional bibliography.

66 Cf. MAZZINGHI, La Sapienza, presente accanto a Dio e all'uomo.

67 I agree here with the conclusions of VIGNOLO, Wisdom, Prayer and Kingly Pattern.

4. Conclusions

The Book of Wisdom represents a type of Judaism particularly open to interaction with the Greek world, but at the same time firmly anchored in the faith of the fathers. Our sage knows how to strengthen this faith because he can respond to the questions and challenges posed by a new world.

In the light of this interaction, the traditional values of the family, of the conjugal and parental relationship, although important, do not appear any longer so central. In fact, there emerge, or are deepened, other models of relationship: the friendly, the educative (already present in Ben Sira), but, above all, the model of an exclusive relationship with Wisdom which is in reality the foundation of a relationship of familiarity and friendship with God. Even the very idea of God undergoes a change: the Book of Wisdom, not exempt in this case from Stoic influences, succeeds in replying to the problem of the relationship between the divine transcendence and immanence, between creation and salvation precisely by means of the figure of personified Wisdom: the God whom the book presents is the "sovereign, friend of life" (cf. 11:21), the God who educates his people (cf. 11:9; 12:22).

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